# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN REMOTE WORK: INSIGHTS INTO EFFICIENCY GAPS, DIGITAL FATIGUE, AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING ACROSS SECTORS

**Azamat Sulaymonov**

***Bukhara Engineering Technological Institute, Uzbekistan***

**Annotatsiya:** COVID-19 pandemiyasi ish muhitini tubdan o‘zgartirib, masofaviy ishlashni keng tarqalgan zaruratga aylantirdi. Ushbu tadqiqot masofaviy ishning samaradorlik, xodimlar farovonligi va hamkorlikka ta’sirini o‘rganadi. 400 nafar masofaviy xodimlar o‘rtasida o‘tkazilgan so‘rov samaradorlikdagi farqlar, raqamli charchoq va demografik omillarni tahlil qiladi. Natijalar diqqatni jamlashning yaxshilanishi kabi afzalliklar, shuningdek, raqamli haddan tashqari yuklanish va hamkorlikning kamayishi kabi muammolarni aniqlaydi. Menejerlar uchun tavsiyalar moslashuvchan siyosatlar, xodimlarni rag‘batlantirish dasturlari va masofaviy ish muhiti uchun innovatsion vositalarni qamrab oladi.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** Masofaviy ish, COVID-19, raqamli charchoq, samaradorlik, hamkorlik, gibrid ish, xodimlar farovonligi, moslashuvchan siyosatlar.

**Аннотация:** Пандемия COVID-19 изменила структуру рабочего процесса, сделав удаленную работу массовой необходимостью. В данном исследовании рассматривается влияние удаленной работы на производительность, благополучие сотрудников и сотрудничество между ними в различных секторах. Количественный опрос 400 удаленных сотрудников выявляет различия в эффективности, цифровую усталость и влияние демографических факторов. Результаты показывают преимущества (например, улучшение концентрации) и недостатки (например, цифровая перегрузка, снижение уровня сотрудничества). Практические рекомендации для менеджеров включают гибкую политику, программы признания и инновационные инструменты для улучшения условий удаленной работы.

**Ключевые слова:** Удаленная работа, COVID-19, цифровая усталость, производительность, сотрудничество, гибридная работа, благополучие сотрудников, гибкая политика.

**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped workplace dynamics, making remote work a widespread necessity. This study examines the impacts of remote work on productivity, well-being, and collaboration across sectors. A quantitative survey of 400 remote workers explores efficiency gaps, digital fatigue, and demographic influences. Findings reveal both benefits (e.g., improved focus) and challenges (e.g., digital overload, reduced collaboration). Practical recommendations for managers include flexible policies, recognition programs, and innovative tools to improve remote work environments.

**Keywords:** Remote work, COVID-19, digital fatigue, productivity, collaboration, hybrid work, employee well-being, flexible policies.

This article contributes to better understanding of how the pandemic has created the ideal conditions to test remote working on a large scale and why it is important to managing and leading people. There are no rules yet. How a new working culture is being constrained by rigid mindsets or rules that shaped the way we worked previously or new style of management is needed out of necessity and an opportunity of new reality?

Impact of Covid-19 on genders are discussed by Alon *et al*. (2020), Malkov (2020), Hupkau and Petrongolo (2020), Avdiu and Nayyar (2020). Feasibility of working at home for all occupations is discussed by (Dingel and Neiman, 2020; Alon *et al*., 2020; Malkov 2020; Béland *et al.,* 2020). Feelings of loneliness or isolation and lack of motivation, lack of motivation, returning to a workplace is surveyed by IBM Institute for Business Value (2020). Since motives and scale of appliance of remote working are different, current situation differs from pre-Covid world and research is needed to find to what extent efficiency gap differs in different sectors. Moreover, demography has indeed has an effect on overall well-being of workers.

According to survey among 6,000 Australian workers (including 1,400 managers) who enforced to work from home because of Covid-19 pandemic during June and July of 2020, over one third of managers valued their teams as higher productive than in traditional office atmosphere, while for over 50% managers productivity remains the same. Teams are perceived as less productive by only 8.4% of managers (Colley and Williamson, 2020). Research is needed to find to what extent efficiency gap differs within married couples, single parents, and childless workers who work remotely with cross-sector insight. Is productivity and self-rated performance the same?

Global Workplace Analytics (2020) satisfaction with work activity performance differs at the Pre-covid office and remote working during quarantine. For 72% of remote respondents are satisfied with being able to deal with managing distractions and interuptions. While in pre-Covid office only 40% of respondents could manage distractions and interuptions. 80% of remote workers note that they are able to gather their attention longer period of time for particular task. While in pre-Covid office only 51% of respondents could focus on extended periods of time. Remote working has an advantage over office work on thinking creatively and innovatively and confidential work conversations. 8 out of 10 remote workers note that remote working enables them atmosphere of private work or conversations and innovative thinking. While in pre-Covid office slightly over 60% of respondents could think in creative ways and have confidential work conversations. Compared to pre-Covid office, current remote workers are less satisfied with level of reaching

colleagues; getting timely information, answers, decisions; being aware of team priorities and goals; access to work files and materials. The level of satisfaction is about 10% lower remote workers to pre-covid office. Level of contentment further goes down when it comes to collaboration and being aware of what is goin on in the organization. In pre-covid office over 80 % of employees were satisfied with the level of collaboration and awareness. While this number constitutes under 60% for home workers in regards to the level of collaboration and awareness. Satisfaction level gap between current remote workers and pre-Covid office workers from coaching and mentoring constitutes 30 %. 8 out of 10 pre-Covid office workers were content with the level of coaching and mentoring. While this number is 5 out of 10 for those who work form home(Global Workplace Analytics 2020). Research is needed to find to what extent efficiency gap; managing distractions and interuptions; level of reaching colleagues; getting timely information; collaboration with colleagues; coaching and mentoring; differs within different sectors.

Moreover, Microsoft 365's trillions of productivity signs measure the precise level of digital fatigue experienced by employees. The total number of meetings and conversations has gradually risen since last year, suggesting that the digital intensity of employees' days has increased considerably. This deluge of details is unstructured and largely unplanned, with 62% of Staff calls and meetings being unscheduled or impromptu. Despite meeting and chat overload, 50% of people respond to Teams talks in five minutes or less, a response time that hasn't improved year over year. This demonstrates that the intensity of our workday has risen dramatically, as has the level of expectation placed on workers during this period (Microsoft 2021). Research is needed to find the level of digital overload and exhaustion in different sectors.

Organizations' implementation of e-learning is hampered by strict rules, a lack of digital maturity, and organizational difficulties. Switching from being an information-based company to a knowledge-based company is a huge obstacle for today's businesses. Enterprise employees must work in increasingly intense information and knowledge-oriented environments in order to preserve the productivity of their companies. On the basis of everyday facts and practice, traditional learning methods fail to substantiate learning flow. Humans (e.g., staff, administrators, and civil servants) must be at the forefront of the knowledge and learning flow, and conventional learning must be bridged by experiential, social, and smart learning (Giannakos *et al.*, 2021). Research is needed to find the level of knowledge sharing within company and hybrid workers` favorite business training method.

**Research methodology**

Research choice of this study is quantitative approach to find proper answer to relational questions of variables within the research and main research question. Under the quantitative method of research where primary data will be used, descriptive analysis will be used in order to examine various forms of practices in flexible working options. Quantitative method has been adopted by using Google Forms in order to survey the data from the structured questionnaire.

The survey consisted of 12 multiple-choice questions and 18 questions that were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Two open ended questions, respondents may answer in their own words which answers may not be exactly the same with others, not fixed answers that are proposed by researcher. At the same time, open questions facilitate to search for further response from participants and take needed information. The aim was to conduct the survey with 400 remote/flexible workers on different sectors and countries. From 1st of May till 30th of July 2021 respondents were given 5-10 minutes to fill in the survey anonymously, and 406 customers responded. Because not all surveys were fully completed, 400 survey results were included in the analysis.

The acquired data was prepared prior to analysis. Missing data and outliers were checked in the dataset. Outliers were defined as values that were outside the calculated range. The data was then examined with the SPSS 28.0 statistical software.

**Table 1. Employee loyalty as a most important resource**

| | |
|---|---|
| **To have loyal staff** | **Appreciation** |
| | 1. Receiving social media recognition and an online gift certificates<br>2. Open recognition during staff meetings<br>3. Receiving congratulatory emails<br>4. Recognition lunch from restaurant in neighborhood<br>5. Offer a stipend to help you set up home office, co-working memberships and coffee shop working purchase reimbursements |
| | **Sympathetic help** |
| | 1. Trust on employees<br>2. Give workers more incentives, motivation |

| | |
|---|---|
| | **Promotion/growth** |
| | 1. More effective online support and feedback systems, online training<br>2. More mid-level positions for remote working |
| | **Working conditions** |
| | 1. Fully remote working<br>2. Hybrid working<br>3. Focus on output instead of process<br>4. Asynchronous communication and work<br>5. Let us choose our own tools, funds to purchase home office equipment<br>6. Job sharing, equal workload with everyone<br>7. Permanent remote working, presence in the office only for specific meetings<br>8. Always be ahead with technology<br>9. Agenda during meetings to be more effective, virtual attendance, better short term goal setting and planning<br>10. Better team organization, more involvement of manager with employees<br>11. Long-term part-time work arrangements and/or changing from part-time to full-time work<br>12. Clarify goals and set clear expectations |
| | **Flexibility** |
| | 1. Option to choose when and where to work.<br>2.Less office working hours, compressed work week<br>3. Possibility of working from anywhere in the world, not just my own country<br>4. Manage time over the year, flexibility on when to take the days off and annual leave |

**Managerial implications.** The findings presented in this study filled a gap in the literature regarding the workplace engagement of remote workers, biggest challenges and remote worker loyalty.

In order to keep staff engaged and maintain high level managers need to extend innovation incentives; explain how employee`s work contribute to the success of company going forward; show faith in remote employees and give them some space; take into account of social, mental, physical, emotional health of staff; offer health club memberships; organize virtual team building activities; provide challenging tasks for employees; give direction and provide support, such as listening and providing rationale; encourage innovation and let people tinker with their idea, rather than finding a fault; regular informal check-in; provide remote working tools; continuous communication; pay electricity and printing costs; encourage higher level of contact within colleagues; allow remote working from another country; meetings held online to be fair to everyone even if some people are in the office, future promotions and career advancement opportunities should be equally feasible for me as office colleagues.

The biggest challenges remote staff want their manager take into account are loneliness; not being able to unplug; staying motivated; being trusted to do job without constant check-ins and micro-managing; take into account of digital overload and exhaustion from email, meeting, docs, calls; finding reliable Wi-Fi; distractions at home; being in a different time zone than teammates; difficulties with collaboration and communication; workload; taking vacation time; let staff choose their work schedule, including prearranged time blocks for meetings, email-free times.

To stay operating next two years remote employees want to have **appreciation for their work**, such as receiving social media recognition and an online gift certificates; open recognition during staff meetings; receiving congratulatory emails; recognition lunch; offering a stipend to help set up home office, coworking memberships and coffee shop working purchase reimbursements, **to have sympathetic help**, such as trust on employees; give workers more incentives, motivation, **promotion/growth**, such as more effective online support and feedback systems, online training, **working conditions,** such as fully or hybrid working, presence in the office only for specific meetings; asynchronous communication and work; funds to purchase home office equipment; equal workload with everyone; agenda during meetings to be more effective, virtual attendance, better short term goal setting and planning; better team organization, more involvement of manager with employees; clarify goals and set clear expectations, **work flexibility**, such as option to choose when and where to work; manage time over the year, flexibility on when to take the days off and annual leave.

**Limitation of study and future exploration.** There were several limitations to this study. Limitations are related to the following points: **Formulation of research aims and objectives**. Research objectives of this paper such as, to find to what extent efficiency gap differs in different sectors, the level of digital overload and exhaustion in different sectors, demography and its impact on overall well-being of workers, formulated too broadly. Country of residence of respondents is not taken into account. Responses may differ for developed, developing and third world countries. Remote work is not a new phenomenon, but it has become more prevalent of late. The current manuscript approaches remote work from a wide variety of lenses: work-family, stress/strain, job design. Thus, it sacrifices depth for breadth. For example, taking job autonomy, our readers might want to better understand why perceptions of autonomy may matter for remote workers more so than those who do not work remotely. What are the mechanisms? How does it change our views of autonomy? Or remote work?

**Implementation of data collection method.** A limitation of this study included the data collection method of questionnaire. Questionnaires can't fully determine respondents' emotions without face-to-face conversations, which can help to determine facial expressions. In addition, some questions are difficult to answer due to their content nature, making it difficult for respondents to provide accurate feedback, which affects the survey. Sometimes, respondents may misunderstand the questions. In some cases, someone might not be available to explain his/her choice, by simply clicking responses they may cause to skewed results. Although, there is no evidence that this limitation was present in any of the participants of current survey, questionnaires are needed to include attention checking questions.

***References***:

1. Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. https://doi.org/10.3386/w26947
2. Avdiu, B., & Nayyar, G. (2020). When face-to-face interactions become an occupational hazard: Jobs in the time of COVID-19. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*.
3. Béland, L. P., Brodeur, A., Haddad, J., & Mikola, D. (2020). The short-term economic consequences of COVID-19: Occupation tasks and mental health in Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*, 46(S1), S23-S35. https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2020-049
4. Colley, L., & Williamson, S. (2020). Remote work and COVID-19: Productivity and job satisfaction during the pandemic. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 79(3), 464–473.

5. Dingel, J. I., & Neiman, B. (2020). How many jobs can be done at home? *Journal of Public Economics*, 189, 104235. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104235
6. Giannakos, M. N., Sharma, K., Papavlasopoulou, S., & Kostakos, V. (2021). Bridging traditional and experiential learning: The role of knowledge flow in hybrid work environments. *Learning and Instruction*, 74, 101473. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2021.101473
7. Global Workplace Analytics. (2020). Work-from-home experience: Productivity and satisfaction insights. Retrieved from https://www.globalworkplaceanalytics.com
8. Hupkau, C., & Petrongolo, B. (2020). Work, care and gender during the COVID-19 crisis. *Fiscal Studies*, 41(3), 623-643. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-5890.12245
9. IBM Institute for Business Value. (2020). COVID-19 and the future of remote work. Retrieved from https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value
10. Malkov, E. (2020). Remote work in the post-pandemic era: A demographic perspective. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 34(2), 29-45.
11. Microsoft. (2021). The work trend index: Annual report on digital overload. Retrieved from https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/work-trend-index